

NEWS RELEASES

THE OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

21 July 2006

GOVERNMENT SEEKS CHAMPION FOR VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

Government is committed to ensuring voices of victims and survivors of the troubles are heard and respected, said Victims Minister David Hanson.

He was speaking as the Government today launched a public consultation on its proposals to enact legislation to establish the post of Commissioner for Victims and Survivors in Northern Ireland.

The Minister said: **"The post is a significant step to providing a new focus on the needs of the victims and survivors of the troubles in Northern Ireland. I am glad to be able to make public Government's commitment to establishing this important post."**

Mr Hanson added: **"The Government is keen to take practical steps to help those who have suffered as a result of the troubles in Northern Ireland. We are seeking views on proposals to establish a post of Commissioner for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland on a statutory basis."**

An Interim Commissioner, Mrs Bertha McDougall, was appointed last October to carry out some essential preparatory work prior to the statutory appointment.

The Minister added: **"I want to thank Bertha McDougall for her work so far. We now need to build upon the excellent preparatory work carried out by Mrs McDougall as Interim Commissioner. This work includes looking at the effectiveness of current funding arrangements and considering the practical issues of establishing a victims and survivors forum."**

The Interim Commissioner is expected to report to the Secretary of State by the end of the year. By that time it is intended that the Victims and Survivors Order will have received the approval of Parliament, and a public appointments process will be underway to identify the statutory Commissioner.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

All media enquiries to OFMDFM Press Office 028 9052 2659.

The following are the main features of the Proposal:

- To provide for the establishment of a position of Commissioner for Victims and Survivors to be appointed by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, acting jointly (Secretary of State under direct rule).
- The term 'victim and survivor' to relate to conflict-related incidents and to mean those physically or psychologically injured; those bereaved; those who provide substantial care on a regular basis for someone who has been physically or psychologically injured; those who are psychologically injured because they have witnessed a conflict related incident or as a result of their providing emergency assistance in connection with a conflict related incident.
- For the purposes of the draft Order 'conflict related' means incidents occurring in or after 1968, generally viewed as the start of the 'troubles'.
- The Commissioner to have a principle aim of promoting the interests of victims and survivors with a range of duties and powers in support of this. These include keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice affecting the interests of victims and

survivors; keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of services provided for them; providing advice to the Secretary of State, the Executive Committee of the Assembly and others; commissioning or undertaking research. The Commissioner will have a duty to take forward a Victims and Survivors Forum.

- The activities of the Commissioner will be the subject of a work programme to be agreed with the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (Secretary of State under direct rule).
- The Commissioner will be appointed for a period of 4 years with the possibility of appointment for one further period of four years.
- Provision for there no longer to be a post of Commissioner should such a post no longer be deemed necessary; this is an Order making power exercisable by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister acting jointly - or the Secretary of State under direct rule.
- Provision for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (with the approval of DFP) to pay grants for the purpose of assisting victims and survivors.

The consultation will close on Friday 15 September. The consultation document is available on the Victims Unit website, www.victimsni.gov.uk.

Further copies of the document can be obtained from:

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